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COSTUME: Book review

The First Book of Fashion: The Book of Clothes of Matthäus and Veit Konrad Schwarz of Augsburg, ed. by Ulinka Rublack and Maria Hayward (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). 410 pp., 187 col. illus. £30. ISBN 9780857857682.

In Augsburg in 1520 a 23 year old accountant called Matthäus Schwarz commissioned the first illustrations for a new project, his *Kleidungsbüchlein* or little book of clothes. His plan was to record the style of his clothing throughout his life, from infancy to adulthood and continue with this through the rest of his life. It would serve as a record of the changing fashions of the time and would be instructive and entertaining to later generations. He himself, when young, had enjoyed listening to accounts of the older clothing styles of Augsburg and it was this pleasure in clothes that seems to have guided him, in part, to the book project. With the death of his father in 1519, he had already begun to record the details of his private life in a journal he titled *Der Welt Lauf* – the Course of the World. Many of the early illustrations in his clothing book refer to events he had described in this journal. Sadly, on the eve of his marriage in 1538, he ‘threw away The Course of the World – that is to say The Rake’s Life’. Perhaps in the new cultural climate that had swept into Augsburg with the Protestant Reformation, and was in part the prompt to marriage and respectability, he felt there was something improper about the content of this book. After his marriage he continued to record his clothing, although the frequency declines and with the funeral of his company boss, Anton Fugger, he commissions what turns out to be the last illustration in his clothing book, reflecting on how very different the clothes on this sombre occasion were when compared to the eye-catching and celebratory red outfit he had worn at Anton Fugger’s wedding, 33 years before. Although Matthäus abandoned his personal project, he persuaded his younger son, Veit Konrad, to make a similar clothing record, so that the fashions of the younger generation might be recorded. Veit Konrad went along with this project since his father was footing the bill for the artist’s illustrations. But once Veit Konrad had met this initial obligation, recording his clothing from infancy through to his young adulthood – he was then about 19 ½ years old – he did not continue with the project. We leave him, in the last illustration of his book, learning how to fight with a long sword - a virile, energetic portrait of youth.

The First Book of Fashion is a very handsome publication, illustrated throughout in colour, showing the contents of these two little 16th century books which were composed of leaves of tempera paintings on parchment. In the case of Matthäus Schwarz, the illustrations span a good deal of his life, from babyhood to his 63rd year, although the highest concentration of images were made in his twenties and thirties. This is the first time these books have been reproduced entirely in colour, and their original German annotations translated into English (Ulinka Rublack’s transcription is available to read, for free, in the original 16th century German on the Bloomsbury website). The book begins with an essay by Rublack which sets the historical and cultural context of Augsburg in the 16th century, describing the highly successful and influential Fugger trading company for which Matthäus Schwarz worked as chief accountant, the effects of the Protestant Reformation and biographical and behavioural observations on Schwartz himself and his relationship with clothing and fashion. There

follows an essay by Maria Hayward which looks in more detail at the clothing of father and son, as portrayed in the books, and relates it to influences from Italy, Spain, France and Germany itself, and to generational changes in fashion. Reference is made to artworks and surviving museum examples that help contextualise their clothing. In the case of Matthäus much of his young adulthood was spent sporting clothes in the *Landsknechte* style, that is, elaborately paned and slashed doublet and hose (which his son Veit Konrad later thought ridiculous). My favourite was a fustian doublet that he boasted had 4,800 slashes. He also took pride in tailor's bills where the labour cost more than the materials. Matthäus was also well travelled, for as a youth he spent two years in Italy learning his book-keeping and accounting skills, and his work involved regular travel overseeing the affairs of the Fuggers whose trade network extended across Europe. He shows awareness of fashions beyond the limits of his home town. The core of the book then follows – reproductions of the two little books of clothes of both father and son, amounting to 172 full page illustrations. The next section provides a systematic commentary by Maria Hayward, analysing each illustration for its clothing detail. This also occupies a significant proportion of the book. A glossary of textile and clothing terms completes the volume, but before that is inserted a fascinating chapter by Jenny Tiramani on the practical interpretation and clothing reconstruction of an outfit based on an illustration from Matthäus Schwarz's book of clothes – a doublet of paned satin and hose of decoratively slashed leather. The results, although based on other period references and an element of conjecture, are very effective.

This book is more than a mere fashion reference. Matthäus Schwarz's book is the documentation of a life of the 16th century, however occasional and episodic. Although he is in control of what he chooses to have portrayed, there is also a revealing, unwitting element to this self-projection. At one point, approaching his 30th year, he shows us his naked fleshy self, lamenting that he has put on weight and become fat. His waist is no longer the 24 inch waist he had in his early twenties – although his illustrator, Narziss Renner, continues to show his clothed body with a svelte waistline. In this nude illustration he is shown against a black void, without the social and civic background that form the context for his clothed self. In 1538, when he decides to 'take a wife', he shows us not his future bride, but his new gown. After his marriage, the clothes and the mood of the illustrations darken with time. In his 50th year, Matthäus has a stroke and we see his recovery documented; first at home recuperating, assisted by his young family; then walking with the aid of a stick, his weakened left arm in a sling; finally his return to work and some normality but his arm still tied to his belt for support. On the final page of his book, attending Anton Fugger's funeral, he is cloaked in black, reflecting on happier days. We see him in both the summer and winter of his life. There is much more that could be said about the content of these two small manuscript books and the interpretation of their images – in fact, the originals had attracted much scholarship and commentary before the appearance of this book. *The First Book of Fashion* brings together these two fascinating documents, beautifully reproduced with illuminating commentary, to a wider English-speaking readership, for the first time. University and museum libraries will of course buy this book, but the price and quality make this a worthwhile purchase for any student of Renaissance fashion and cultural history.

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